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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 273rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 5 August 2003, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Fall ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report by the Chairman on the Third Ordinary Session of the Executive Council and the Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, Maputo, 4-12 July 2003

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, United Nations Office at Geneva, 15 and 16 July 2003, and the Consultations with Civil Society Organizations, United Nations Office at Geneva, 16 July 2003

2. **The Chairman**, presenting his report on the Third Ordinary Session of the Executive Council and the Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, said that the Executive Council had devoted considerable attention to the question of Palestine and the Middle East. Mr. Kaddoumi, Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs, had described to the Council the tragic plight of the Palestinian people. Thanking the Member States of the African Union for their constant support, he had urged them to continue their search for a solution to Palestinian issues. He had called on the countries of Africa and the international community to apply increased pressure on Israel to implement the Quartet's road map to peace (S/2003/529) of 7 May 2003, on an unconditional basis and without delay. Following a lively debate, the Executive Council had voted to reiterate its long-standing support for Palestinian rights, including the right of return, the right to self-determination, and the right to create an independent, viable State. Furthermore, it had denounced the Israeli occupation and its continued building of settlements. Those two factors were the main obstacles to the realization of those rights and to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Israel should honour its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant additional Protocol, without prejudice to efforts to combat impunity for war crimes or to the role of the International Criminal Court. The two parties should implement the road map without delay and without modification. The Executive Council was in favour of an international presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, to protect the civilian population and assist the parties in implementing the concluded agreements. Israel had an obligation to conform to international law. The Executive Council had condemned the measures imposed by Israel on Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and pledged its full support to Mr. Arafat.

3. With regard to the Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, he noted that Mr. Kaddoumi had conveyed to the Session the message of peace sent by Mr. Arafat.

4. Presenting his report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People and the Consultations with Civil Society Organizations, he noted that the purpose of the Seminar had been to discuss the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, caused by almost three years of violence. The deep humanitarian crisis and the dire living conditions of the Palestinian people were of special concern to the Committee. The road map stipulated a series of specific steps aimed at improving the humanitarian and economic situation in the region. Implementing those provisions and creating an appreciable change for the better on the ground were vital for the Palestinian people and crucial for the overall success of the road map. The Seminar had given the international community a chance to help normalize the life of the Palestinian people. Its three main themes had been the dimensions of the Palestinian crisis, priorities for humanitarian and economic assistance, and strategies for the future Palestinian economy.

5. The Seminar had been very successful. The panel presentations and the ensuing discussions had highlighted the dismal conditions of the Palestinians, the wide-scale destruction of infrastructure and property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the steady deterioration of the Palestinian economy. Although it had already been two months since the parties had begun implementing the road map, no tangible results had been seen by the average Palestinian. Seminar participants had identified the reduction of unemployment and poverty as the main priority, with respect to assistance. Sustainable development was impossible without a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

6. The report of the Seminar would be prepared by the Secretariat and presented to the forthcoming fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. It would also be issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights. The Committee delegation had also taken advantage of its presence in Geneva to engage in informal talks with the Committee on Middle East Questions of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The two Committees had agreed to continue and expand the involvement of parliamentarians of different backgrounds in the meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee.

7. The Committee's consultations with representatives of non-governmental organizations had been very concrete and useful. The Committee delegation had encouraged the organizations present to maintain their principled positions in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to make their constituencies aware of the root cause of the conflict: the occupation of Palestinian land by Israel.

Developments in the Middle East peace process and the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem

8. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Observer for Palestine) recalled the positive atmosphere that had reigned at the formal presentation of the road map in April 2003. On that occasion, the Palestinian side had expressed its unequivocal acceptance of the road map and its readiness to fully implement it. However, the Israeli side had been rather vague in its acceptance and had submitted a long list of so-called "concerns" and conditions, which had cast a shadow of doubt over the possibilities for honest implementation of the document.

9. At the Aqaba summit, the Palestinian statement had been in line with the requirements of the road map and had even gone beyond them, whereas Israel had failed to declare its official acceptance of a sovereign Palestinian State or a cessation of violent activities. Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority had persevered in its efforts and had been successful in obtaining the agreement of all national groups to a three-month ceasefire.

10. Unfortunately, the positive atmosphere had been poisoned by the persistence of a number of restrictions imposed by the occupying Power on the movement of persons and goods within the Occupied Territory and on settlement activities in certain areas, including Gaza. In addition, up to 7,000 Palestinian prisoners were being unlawfully held by the Israeli authorities, who maintained that their release was not required under the terms of the road map. However, most of those prisoners had been detained after the road map had been accepted by the Quartet, and it was clear that, under those circumstances and while Mr. Arafat remained under house arrest, there could be no honest implementation of the agreement.

11. A high-level Palestinian delegation had, the previous week, visited Washington to discuss, inter alia, ways of strengthening bilateral relations with the United States. Following that visit, the Palestinian side had had high hopes of a substantial improvement in the situation in the Middle East, but those hopes had been dashed a few days later, when Mr. Sharon had visited Washington and expressed his Government's intention to proceed with settlement activities, in particular the construction of the wall of separation.

12. According to the Israeli side, the wall was intended as a protective measure. However, its construction was a clear form of settlement activity: it cut right through Palestinian territory and would result in the confiscation of large swathes of Palestinian land, isolate communities from one another and destroy their livelihoods. Furthermore, it completely encircled the city of Qalqilya, leaving only one gate for its citizens to enter and exit the city. That type of repression had no historical precedent: even the apartheid regime in South Africa had not resorted to such practices.

13. The previous day, at a meeting of the Knesset, Mr. Sharon had stated that the Israeli side had not yet given anything to the Palestinians. For once, his assertion had been correct. The wall of separation, the pursuit of settlement activities and the repeated attacks on holy sites in the Occupied Territory had made it impossible to conceive of any reasonable implementation of the road map.

14. All the members of the Quartet, supported by other international bodies, including the United Nations Security Council, must step up their efforts to find a solution to the conflict. In that regard, he stressed the importance of establishing the monitoring mechanism agreed upon in the road map, since it would contribute significantly towards ensuring that that agreement was implemented in a reasonable fashion.

15. The United Nations had a permanent responsibility to the Palestinian question until such a time as a genuine and lasting settlement had been reached. A new campaign to undermine the organization and its work had been launched by Mr. Sharon, on the pretext that United Nations resolutions and action were anti-Israeli. That claim was obviously nonsensical, since the Organization was not in the business of taking sides but had merely condemned the unlawful acts carried out by the Israeli side which violated the human rights of the Palestinian people and prevented the resolution of the conflict. The United Nations must continue to uphold international law and to support the full and honest implementation of the road map and must not succumb to outside pressure from any side.

16. He remained cautiously optimistic that the efforts of the Quartet and the international community as a whole would contribute towards improving the situation in the Middle East. Indeed, a potentially positive development had been announced that very day, namely, that the United States was considering reducing its loan guarantees to Israel if it persisted in its efforts to build the wall of separation.

17. **The Chairman** said that the construction of the security wall was an extremely important issue which merited further study by the Committee. He intended to include that issue as an agenda item or sub-item at a future meeting.

The meeting rose at 11:30 a.m.